

# OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES: HIS TEACHERS AND TEACHING

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We remember what we laugh or what we cry over; and we remember the man who makes us smile or sigh. This in part may explain the spell of the author of "The Last Leaf" over his disciples.

Besides being among the most cultured and scholarly of Americans, he was one of the most human and loveable of men, Goldsmith, Lamb, Twain and Leacock appeal to us in much the same way as Holmes. All of them suffered and laughed and learned. In the valley of Baca, they made it a well.

Holmes attained distinction as professor of anatomy, poet, essayist, and popular lecturer; in a lesser degree he shone as a theologian, a psychologist, a bibliophile and a humorist.

Holmes' span of life extended from 1809 to 1894; being born a hundred years to a day after Samuel Johnston whom he often remembered on special days of his own and of the great lexicographer. Holmes was profoundly influenced by the great men who preceded him—not only those mentioned above (our Leacock excluded of course), but by Pope, Dryden, Henry Drayton, Virgil, Horace, Homer, Dante, Browne, Montaigne and scores of others, some of lesser note, who wrote about weird and strange matters.

Holmes lived for most of his life in close contact with the brightest minds in New England—Lowell, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Emerson, Agassiz, Pierce, Channing, Thoreau, Alcott, Norton, Higginson, Father Taylor, Margaret Fuller, and others. Of his medical associates we shall speak more in detail later.

His father, Reverend Abdiel Holmes, educated at Yale, preached from 1792 to 1830 to a Congregational congregation in Cambridge. The home was on the edge of Harvard Campus and made immortal by Oliver in several of his writings, since it contained a wonderful library, a curiously stored attic and had some very interesting historical associations. Rev. Abdiel was fond of old and curious books, rare editions of the classics particularly. Among his numerous activities he was secretary

of the Massachusetts Historical Society, of the American Educational Society and of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. He was a lecturer on Ecclesiastical History in Harvard, and wrote a history of Cambridge and "The Annals of America." His wife was Sarah Wendell.

Grandfather David Holmes was a medical doctor who served as a captain in the French and Indian wars; and in the American Revolution he did his bit as an army surgeon. His wife was Mrs. Temperance Bishop. (Note the quaint family names.) Dr. David's father was David, known as "The Deacon," and married to Bathsheba somebody. The Deacon's father, John H., was born at Roxbury, then near, now in, Boston, in 1664; moved to Woodstock, Connecticut—a public spirited man who filled many prominent positions. His wife was a Newall.

The first Holmes of which we have record was a lawyer of Gray's Inn, who fought in the civil war, and was present at the siege of Oxford, 1647. I surmise he was a Roundhead.

Sarah Wendell was bright, keen, witty and vivacious, beloved by neighbors and parishioners. Her father was a judge, born in 1773, graduated at twenty from Harvard; was a selectman at the siege of Boston and was delegated to keep an eye open for British spies. His wife was Mary Jackson, daughter of Dorothy Quincy. Beautiful Dorothy's picture in the gambrel-roofed house, with a spear thrust through it, was the inspiration of our poet's "Dorothy Q."

The Judge was the son of Jacob, who, with his brother, Abraham, were attracted from the Wendell settlement near Albany to Boston, where they became successful in business; a portion of their fortune, I gather, was inherited by their distinguished scion. These two Wendell brothers were the sons of Jensen, whose forebear, Evert, migrated from Friesland, near the German border, 1648.

Judge Wendell's mother was one Sarah Oliver, daughter of Dr. John Oliver. Young Oliver Wendell Holmes in rummaging around the attic discovered an old recipe book which belonged to Dr. John (his grandfather's grandfather) in which it was found that this pioneer medical practitioner of New England used fennel, parsley, snake root, elderberry and saffron. He prepared from these, various elixirs and cordials—one special one, Elixir Proprietatis. He was also the maker of a celebrated plaster, the recipe of which was handed down as an heirloom; and when young Oliver suffered from "ager" (face ache) or other pangs of various regions of his body, his mother, Sarah, prepared and applied what they called "a Doctor Oliver." Dr. James was the son of Lieut.-Governor

Andrew, who was the son of Daniel, the son of Thomas. Lieut.-Governor Andrew is referred to by certain historians as the obnoxious stamp distributor.

It is our Oliver who said that to make anything of a boy, first catch his grandfather; hence our study of his forebears.

Holmes' maternal great, great grandmother, Sarah Oliver, through her mother had as forebear Mercy Bradstreet, daughter of Dr. Samuel Bradstreet, son of Governor Simon Bradstreet, who married Ann Dudley, the first poet in America. Her book, "The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America," was published in London, 1650, and ran through eight editions. It is now scarce. James Russell Lowell presented a copy of the second edition to the Harvard Library. Anne's book bore the following foreword.

"Several poems compiled with great variety of wit and learning, full of delight, wherein especially is contained a complete discourse and description of the four elements, constitutions, ages of man, seasons of the year, together with an exact epitome of the three first monarchies, viz., the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and beginning of the Roman commonweal to the end of their last king; with divers other pleasant and serious poems; by a gentle woman of New England."

Of Anne's father, the Governor, it was written.

"In books poetical, they say,  
A living cyclopædia;  
Of histories of church and priest,  
A full compendium, at least.  
A table talker, rich in sense  
And witty, without wit's pretense."

From the Dudley's were descended the Channings and the Danas. One of Jacob Wendell's and Sarah Oliver's twelve children married a Phillips, who became the grandparents of Wendell Phillips.

The above summary of the family tree, with its legal lights, statesmen, theologians, shrewd business men; its poets, its doctors, and aristocratic gentle folk, throws considerable light on the subject of our sketch, who in writing says, "Give me a man of family—four or five generations of gentlemen and gentlewomen, many of them members of His Majesty's Council for the Provinces, a Governor or so, one or two doctors of divinity, a Member of Congress not later than the time of top boots . . . I go, other things being equal, for the man that inherits family traditions and the cumulative humanities of at least three or four generations. Above all things, as a child he should have tumbled about in a library. All men are afraid

of books who have not handled them in their infancy." These quotations would make one think that Oliver was thinking about himself.

A study of these ancestors would lead one to predict a notable career for the babe born in the gambrel-roofed house on the edge of the Harvard Campus.

The young Oliver had some five years' schooling at a Dame's school in Cambridgeport; following which he was sent to Phillip's Academy at Andover, a town even then, no doubt, noted for its theological atmosphere. It is probable that Rev. Abdiel hoped his boy would follow in his footsteps. Oliver's levity and pranks soon dispelled any idea of the ministry, if any existed, from the mind of his more sedate father. He, however, did become a preacher—using the word in its wider sense—as one will perceive who reads his breakfast table series and his novels. The ministerial characters in his two novels are well drawn, and give us a fine insight into the early New England divines.

Holmes was graduated in Arts in Harvard; then spent two years in medicine before going abroad. He loved his *alma mater* and its traditions; was a favorite among his fellows; edited the college paper; wrote *vers d' occasion* for many celebrations before and after graduation. He loved New England; he loved Boston and did much to make it the intellectual and spiritual centre of the New World. Rome was built on seven hills; Boston, he pointed out, on three. He spent several happy summers in Pittsfield in the Berkshires.

Holmes studied law for one year. Why he began and why he gave up, he himself appeared not to know. He remained Calvinist enough to believe that there is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will. His tentative entrance into literature may have had something to do with deciding him to turn from the legal to the medical profession; for he concluded that the legal profession would not offer him the same opportunity for cultivating his gift of writing as would a career in medicine. His legal studies taught him how to state a case. Already he was suffering from what he called lead-poisoning; already he had noted the metallic taste of articles written at so many guineas a sheet; and felt the power which a good writer wields.

He was only some twenty years of age when the Government proposed to destroy the old battleship, *The Constitution*, lying in Charleston Harbor. His poem "Old Ironsides," published during the white heat of his indignation and broadcasted from coast to coast, compelled the authorities to abandon the idea.

The budding genius was already learning that the key which opened the inner chambers of his own consciousness, fitted the private apartments of a good many other people's thoughts; and he was observing that "it gives many readers a singular delight to find a writer telling them something they have long known or felt, but which they have never found any one to put in words for them." The fullest realization of these powers came to Holmes probably about the time he was contributing "The Autoocrat at the Breakfast Table" to the *Atlantic Monthly*, which had just been established under the editorship of James Russell Lowell, in 1857. It was about this time that the man of science was converted to a man of letters. The style was always worthy of the statement; and the statement rarely failed to merit the style. His contribution to the *Atlantic* caused its subscriptions to increase rapidly.

Holmes' teachers in medicine in Boston were Channing, Ware, Otis, Lewis and Jackson. Of Ware and his son, Holmes in 1864 wrote a memorial poem which he read at the Massachusetts Medical Society. It was James Jackson whom he admired most. Jackson had been an apprentice of Holyoke in 1797 and 98. He crossed to England and served as a dresser at St. Thomas' Hospital under Sir Astley Cooper. He visited Paris and became Pierre Louis' favorite pupil. Jackson was appointed first physician to the Massachusetts General Hospital. His writings embraced a book on Medical Practice published in 1825; "Letters to a Young Physician" in 1855; a paper on Aleoholic Neuritis and an extensive report on Typhoid Fever (in 1838), which added much to our knowledge of the disease.

Holmes formed a deep attachment for Jackson and repeatedly wrote of him in terms of reverence and affection. "While he studied his patients," Holmes writes, "with all the inquisitiveness of a scientist, he cared for every individual among them as one who thought only of their welfare. Those who enjoyed the privilege of his teaching would bear testimony that no man more entirely forgot himself in his duties. He taught his students not to rely on ocular authority alone, but to consider all the facts before them. He educated them for knowledge more than his own. While they recognized in him a master of his art, they left him with minds fully open to new conviction from fresh sources."

Holmes appears to have come under the tuition of John Collins Warren, whom he describes as a cool, skilful operator, a man of unshaken nerves, of determined purpose and of stern ambition, quite as remarkable for his knowledge of the world as for his erudition, one who kept an eye on professional and social distinctions, which he attained and transmitted. Walter

Channing, he says, was meant by nature to be a man of letters like his two brothers, was vivacious, full of anecdote, ready to make trial of new remedies, with an open and receptive intelligence belonging to his name and birthright, esteemed in his specialty by those who called on him in emergencies.

Holmes crossed to Paris in 1833, where he studied two years. Every morning he was at LaPitié Hospital at 7 a.m.; worked until 11 a.m., when he breakfasted. He enjoyed "the pleasant wines and the tasteful viands—very different from the crude joints, the massive puddings, the depressing pies and the hard cider which marvellously nourished New England." Holmes dressed and lived well. At the end of his first year he wrote home for more money, saying to his father that "a boy is worth his manure as well as a potato patch." Holmes loved Paris and its gay life. His own temperament fitted him well for the life there, social and scientific. His mind expanded greatly; and he discarded many of his narrow New England ideas. He loved to haunt the boulevards and quais along the Seine searching for rare old books. In later years when he became a *littérateur* he lamented that he had not tried to cultivate the French writers of the day: Hugo, Balzac, Gautier, Lamartine.

At this period Paris was the leading medical centre of the world and attracted students by hundreds from all parts of Europe, a good many going over from America. The medical world was becoming acutely interested in the work of Laennec, Corvisart and Bichat. All know of Laennec's great work on auscultation by means of the stethoscope invented by him, and his classic studies on phthisis. Corvisart had made contributions on the heart and great vessels and translated Auenbrugger's epoch-making study on percussion. Bichat had demonstrated the importance of studying the relation between the symptoms of disease and the anatomical conditions associated with them. This line of study is still paramount; a writer in a late number of the *Lancet* says, "I venture to think that there is an enormous field still for study of cardiac symptoms and their correlation with anatomical lesions." Bichat's work did a great deal toward upsetting the metaphysical ideas which had dominated the study of medicine, and by which the phenomenon of illness was explained.

Holmes was greatly impressed by his French teachers, among whom were Dupuytren, Larrey, Velpeau, Lisfranc, Ricord, Broussais, and, last and greatest, Pierre Louis, the teacher of his old Boston teacher James Jackson.

Dupuytren was a shrewd diagnostician, a great operator and a fine clinical teacher. He was an experimental physiologist

and pathologist. He rose from poverty, fighting his way to the top, where he brooked no rivals. He became a millionaire and a Baron of the Empire. Crowds of students flocked to him and he turned out many brilliant pupils. He treated 10,000 patients annually. He was the first to excise the lower jaw; he treated aneurisms by compression; wry neck by subcutaneous section of the sterno-mastoid muscle; he successfully ligated the internal iliac artery; a fracture of the lower end of the tibia bears his name; as does also a peculiar contraction of the palmar aponeurosis. He wrote on injuries and diseases of the bones, and of wounds in war. He founded the *société anatomique de Paris*. He displayed the utmost *sang froid* and self control, and was regarded as nobody's friend. He pursued Velpeau and Dumeril, his confreres, with a vindictive hatred. Lisfranc dubbed him "The Brigand of the Hotel Dieu." "Dupuytren," Holmes wrote, "reigned at the Hotel Dieu, and no man disputed his reign, though some envied his supremacy. He marched through the wards like some lesser deity."

Baron Larrey was France's greatest military surgeon. He performed 200 amputations in twenty-four hours at Borodino. He was the first man to amputate at the hip-joint. He initiated first aid to the wounded and wrote "Memoirs of a Military Surgeon." Napoleon left him a legacy of 1,000 francs.

Velpeau was the son of a blacksmith and served his apprenticeship in his father's shop; but rose to great eminence as a surgeon. His work was done in St. Antoine, La Pitié, and La Charité Hospitals. He became professor of clinical surgery and wrote a treatise on surgical anatomy, the first detailed work of the sort ever published. His greatest work was a study and report on diseases of the breast—the most important work of its sort in its time. Velpeau walked to Paris in wooden shoes; speaking of this, Holmes writes, "A good sound head over a pair of wooden shoes is a good deal better than a wooden head belonging to an owner who cases his feet in calfskins."

Lisfranc was connected with La Pitié Hospital. The amputation at the tarso-metatarsal articulation, first done in 1815, forever bears his name. In his special way he performed excision of the rectum, lithotomy and excision of the cervix in women. Like Duputren he was not loved because of his many aspersions of his colleagues. Holmes said, he was a great hewer of limbs and drawer of blood, who regretted missing the opportunity he once had of amputating the magnificent thighs of the splendid guardsman of the old brigade. This remark caused Holmes to leave Lisfranc's clinic.

Holmes followed Baron Larrey around the Hotel Des Invalides, where he lived over again the Napoleonic campaigns,

particularly the last charge of the Red Lancers and the redder field of Waterloo.

Holmes described Ricord, the syphilologist, as the Voltaire of pelvic literature, a sceptic of the race in general, who would have submitted Diana to treatment by mineral specifics and ordered a course of blue pills for the vestal virgins. Ricord first described the three stages of syphilis and differentiated it from gonorrhœa. He wrote more voluminously and authentically on that great subject than any other man up to his time.

Broussais was in his seventh decade when Holmes studied in Paris. His theory that disease was caused mainly by gastro-enteritis had spread, as Holmes expressed it, over Europe like a prairie fire, even gaining some credence in England. He also maintained that spinal irritation played some part in the etiology of disease; and advocated therefor bleeding. Holmes writes that Broussais was like an old volcano which has pretty well used up its fire and brimstone, but is still boiling feebly in its interior, now and then shooting up a spurt of lava and a volley of pebbles.

But Louis was Holmes' idol. It was he who did most to overthrow the wild ideas of Broussais. Louis had studied six years in Russia, where during a serious epidemic of diphtheria, he discovered the impotence of drugs. He almost became a therapeutic nihilist. His teaching on this point was accepted by Holmes, who was nearly expelled from the Massachusetts Medical Society for delivering what was then considered a heterodox pronouncement on the indiscriminate giving of drugs. Louis' experience in Odessa impressed him with the necessity of more study, incessant dissection, hospital practice and more intense study of clinical cases. For his classical paper on phthisis he did 358 dissections and made a minute study of 1,860 clinical cases! Louis strongly favored the collection of clinical facts and figures, rather than reliance on the theories of Galen and his followers. He discovered that many diseases tend to natural recovery. Louis' method of study came to be called the Statistical or Numerical method; he held that deductions concerning diseased states should be made only after carefully tabulating the facts discovered in studying similar conditions; not from the study of a single case.

Louis taught his students a lesson which Holmes heeded not only in his medical studies and teaching, but also in his literary work: "Always make sure that you form a distinct and clear idea of the matter you consider; and always avoid vague approximations, where exact estimates are possible."

Louis' personality made a great impression on his New England student; between them there sprang up a warm friend-

ship. Holmes describes his preceptor as "modest in the presence of Nature; fearless in the face of authority and unwearying in the pursuit of truth." Teacher and taught were brought much together in the meetings of the Society for Medical Observation—Holmes as an ordinary member; Louis as the perpetual president.

Louis was a tall, spare, dignified man; of serene and grave aspect, with a pleasant smile for the student who came into personal relationship with him. There are those who say that Louis is the type of teacher needed in all our medical schools today. An apprentice to a man of Louis' type is an exceptionally fortunate youth.

Holmes admitted that he gave himself too exclusively to Louis' methods, and contended that medical men are too likely to forget what they most should try to do, viz., ward off disease, alleviate suffering and preserve life.

Holmes took a special course in surgery in a morgue adjoining one of the cemeteries of Paris. He was never fond of surgery, however, but this course was of much service to him, since it more thoroughly equipped him as an anatomical teacher, which he soon after became.

During his summers abroad he travelled, visiting the Low Countries, drawn there possibly because the original emigrating Wendell came from there; he also visited the Rhine provinces and London. He returned to Boston in 1835 well equipped for his life work. His powers had developed and he had become possessed of a large amount of professional knowledge and skill. He had gained in self reliance and independence of thought and had acquired a fine store of pleasant and useful memories. Two years later he was graduated in medicine from Harvard and at once joined the Massachusetts Medical Society, of which he was a most useful member. He became attached to the Massachusetts General Hospital. He appeared not to care greatly for general practice; hence was only moderately successful. The publication of a book of verse at this juncture may not have enhanced his reputation as a physician. He advised his own students not to dabble in the muddy sewer of politics nor linger by the enchanted field of literature. He pointed out to them that the great practitioners of medicine were those who concentrated all their powers on this profession. He, however, kept in close touch with all the important movements in medicine. He read much and wrote a goodly number of medical essays, some of which are classics, not only for their content, but for the charming style in which they were written. He obtained three Boylston prizes. The one on

Malaria is an outstanding contribution to the study of Malaria ; and the one on Neuralgia a close second.

In 1838 Holmes was appointed Professor of Anatomy in Dartmouth Medical College in New Hampshire. Shortly after he was called to Tremont Medical School, Boston. In addition to his teaching he assisted Bigelow in the editing of Marshall Hall's "Theory and Practice of Medicine." In 1842 he delivered two notable lectures on Homeopathy. The argument for homeopathy he put thus: "A pebble may produce a mountain, because an acorn can become a forest; because a spark will burn down a city, a mutton chop will feed an army." Hahnemann's absurd theory that most diseases were caused by what he called Psora, by which he meant the itch, appeared to Holmes doubtless as foolish as the doctrines of old Broussais.

In 1833 appeared Holmes' most important contribution to medical literature, "The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever." Following the method of Louis, he gathered a long series of statistics from several sources, which convinced the profession generally that child-bed fever was carried from patient or post mortem room to patient, by doctors or nurses or instruments. In Vienna, Semelweiss, a little later, also believing these were the means of transmitting the disease, directed all his helpers, doctors, nurses, and others, to exercise the most scrupulous cleanliness as to their hands, instruments and dressings, and to the preparation of the patient for the accouchement. The result was a most marked fall in the incidence of this scourge of the lying-in hospitals.

Holmes' conclusions, like those of Pasteur, Lister, and Simpson, were challenged and even ridiculed. Hodge and Meigs, professors of obstetrics in Philadelphia, were very strong in their opposition. Holmes' riposte was that every real thought on every real subject knocks the wind out of somebody or other. As soon as the breath comes back, he very probably begins to expel it in hard words.

He wrote, "I take no offense and attempt no retort. No man makes a quarrel with me over the counterpane that covers a mother with her new-born infant at her breast. There is no epithet in the vocabulary of slight and sarcasm that can reach my personal sensibilities in such a controversy. . . . Persons are nothing in the controversy; better that twenty pamphleteers should be silenced or as many professors unseated than that one mother's life should be taken."

The odds of prestige and authority were strongly against Holmes; but he countered: "Medical students naturally have faith in their instructors, turning to them for truth and taking what they choose to give them; babes in knowledge, not able to

tell the breasts from the bottle, pumping away for the milk of truth at all that offers, were it nothing better than a professor's shrivelled finger."

Concluding his essay, Holmes laid down several rules for the guidance of doctors and nurses in attendance on obstetrical patients.

In the year 1847 Holmes became Dean of Harvard Medical School, which office he retained until 1853, and Professor of Anatomy, which post he filled with great acceptance for thirty-five years. For a large part of this term he taught physiology as well.

"The professor's chair is an insulating stool, so to speak; his age, his knowledge, real or supposed, his official position, are like the glass legs which support the electrician's piece of furniture, and cut it off from the common currents of the floor on which it stands." This quotation shows that Holmes understood the dangers of an academic chair. Writing to Weir Mitchell, he says, "I have noticed that the wood of which academic fauteuils are made has a narcotic quality, which occasionally renders their occupants somnolent, lethargic and even comatose."

One of the Professor's old students tells us that Holmes used to begin his lecture at one o'clock—after the class had listened to five lecturers who preceded him. "Three hundred raw students rush in pell mell; the cadaver is wheeled in. Enter the little professor, five feet four in height. A mighty shout and stamp of applause greets him. In front of him the subject is decorously disposed on a revolving-table and covered with a clean sheet. Respect for poor humanity and admiration for God's divinest work are uppermost in the poet-lecturer's mind. Silence ensues; then begins a charming hour of description, analysis, simile, anecdote, harmless pun, which clothes the dry subject with poetic imagery, enlivens a fatiguing day with humor and brightens the tired listeners." The students received information and were amused at the same time. Iteration and reiteration was his favorite motto in teaching.

Holding up the bony pelvis and touching its lowest parts, he would say, "Gentlemen, these are the tuberosities of the ischia, on which man was designed to sit and survey the work of creation"; and, pointing to the front, "this is the triumphal arch through which every candidate for immortality has to pass." He would compare the microscopical coiled tube of a sweat gland to a fairy's intestine; and the mesentery to shirt ruffles; and the corpus callosum to the band uniting the Siamese twins.

Of Holmes, President Eliot said he never knew any other mortal to exhibit such enthusiasm over an elegant dissection. "You may think he is successful with his pen; he is equally skilful with his scalpel and microscope. He knows every bone, muscle, artery, nerve, and describes them with fascinating precision." Holmes invented an apparatus for the use of direct light in microscopical research; and also the stereoscope and stereograph. He was the first man to use the word "anaesthesia," following the discovery, by Morton, of ether as a general anaesthetic.

In 1863 he gave the inaugural address at the Harvard Medical College. A visitor describes him as "a little man in a dress coat, standing very erect with a stiff neck as if he cannot afford to lose anything of this stature; he has a powerful jaw and a thick underlip. He speaks with sharp, percussive articulation; very deliberate and formal at first, but becomes more engaging as he goes on."

Time and space forbid alluding even to many other contributions Holmes made to medical literature. We now turn briefly to some aspects of his literary work.

Holmes was a lover of old books and old authors and took extreme pleasure in collecting, handling the volumes tenderly, examining the engravings with delight. His library of nearly one thousand volumes he presented to the Boston Medical Library, of which he was president for thirteen years. "These books were very dear to me," he said. "A twig from some one of my nerves ran to every one of them. They marked the progress of my studies, and stood me as stepping stones in my professional life.

"What a delight is the pursuit of the rarities which the eager bookhunter follows with the scent of a beagle hound. Shall I ever forget the dingy bookshop in Lyons where I found an Aëtius, long missing from my *Artis Medicæ Principes*, and where I bought for a small pecuniary consideration the Aphorisms of Hypocrates, edited by, and with a preface from, the hand of Rabelais; and the vellum-bound Tulpus, which I came upon in Venice. And the Sehenkius—a folio filled with *casus rariores* which lay among the rubbish of the bookstall on the boulevards. And the old Vesalius, with its grand frontispiece, not unworthy of Titian. And the fine old Ambroise Paré, long waited for, even in Paris. And the colossal Spigelius with its evicerated beauties. And the Bidloo with its miracle of fine engraving and bad dissection. And the Italian Mascagni, and the pre-Adamite John de Ketam, and the antediluvian Berangerius Carpensis."

Holmes wrote two novels, whose titles at least were fairly familiar to the reading world of the eighties and nineties—"Elsie Venner," and "The Guardian Angel." They still maintain an attraction for the readers of to-day, because of their marked psychological trend, their shrewd analysis of character and their pervasive atmosphere of humor touched with the tenderness so especially belonging to their author. In "Elsie Venner," the background is the incident of a pregnant woman who is bitten by a rattlesnake. The mother dies after giving birth to a child and the story is woven about the growing girl who manifests many peculiarities common to snakes.

The theme is one that gives scope for Holmes' fondness for psychological theories and explorations. The skill with which he uses objective material to build up his subject may be shown in the following summary:

"Elsie wore a barred dress and on her arm as a bracelet a golden asp with emerald eyes, a torque chain around her neck and sometimes a necklace of enamelled scales. She loved to haunt the dreaded rattlesnake cavern, especially in midsummer when the fierce poisons of nature were generated in the heat. Then her nature became most serpentoid and ungovernable. She loved to rattle castanets as she danced. She had the habit of narrowing her eyes like a sleepy cat, and of flattening her forehead. She had a perceptible lisp. Her hands were cold and her glistening eyes would fascinate people and make them shudder and shiver. Her handwriting was sharp and pointed and she wrote on wavy-ribbed paper.

"There were two warring principles in that superb organization—one made her a woman with all of woman's powers and longings, the other chilled the currents of outlet for her emotions. All who came in contact with her were repelled, except her old black slave nurse."

Elsie falls in love with a young school teacher, her love is not returned, and she lets go her hold on life; but the warm human emotion she experiences breaks the evil spell, and she dies mentally and spiritually freed from the serpent taint.

"If the will lies sealed at the fountain," says the author, speaking through one of his characters, "it may be poisoned at its very source so that it flows darkly and deadly through its whole course; who are we that we should judge our fellow-creatures by ourselves."

This restoration of some abnormal or sin-scarred mentality through the power of love or affection is also the motif of "The Guardian Angel," presented from a different angle. The central idea here is that the human dead of past generations may

enjoy a secondary and imperfect, yet self-conscious life in a present bodily tenement.

"This body," says Holmes, "in which we travel across the isthmus between oceans, is not a private carriage, but an omnibus." Myrtle Hazard, the heroine, says, "Presently it seemed to me that I returned to myself, and then those others became a part of me, being taken up one by one and so lost in my life."

In Myrtle, the heroine of the latter tale, the traits and experiences of ancestors reappear and produce in her strange and unaccountable actions, until love and self-sacrifice break the spell. She is cured of her inherited tendencies by happy marriage and self-forgetfulness in service for others.

Apart from any psychological interest these novels may contain, they show also how thoroughly the author was acquainted with New England rural districts of his day in portraiture and shrewd analysis of such characters as Colonel Sproule and his guests, especially Silas Peckham—"thin as if he had been split and dried; with an ashen kind of complexion like the tint of the food he is made of (split codfish), and about as sharp, tough, juiceless and as biting to deal with as the fish is to taste." Eldridge, the hired man (also represents an amusing type of those days).

Herewith we summarize a few of the things Holmes' biographers have written about him as an essayist, poet, philosopher and theologian.

In his "Autoocrat" he has been content to take the homespun, everyday humanity that he found ready to hand—people who congregated round a boarding-house breakfast table—and out of this material he has wrought a genuinely interesting book. He says in a pleasant way what many people do not care to hear. His writing is like bitter-sweet, presenting the foibles and peccadilloes of Americans in general; but, like Walton, he impales the worms on his hook as tenderly as though he loved them; and his more pungently phrased truths are wrapped up in gentle laughter. Yet in the atmosphere of today's frank speech it is hard to realize that some of the straight-laced folk of New England warned their children not to read the "Autoocrat" or "Elsie Venner." One critic says that certain portions of Holmes' writing have helped more or less to increase a spirit of caste and conservatism which paralyses the creative and imaginative spirit of Boston.

In the field of poetry Holmes ranked high both as creator and critic. Holmes held that respiration has an intimate relation to metrical composition. The rhythmical movements of the respiration and the pulse are the time-keepers of the body, each inspiration to four beats of the heart. The reason octo-

syllabic verse is so easy to read aloud is that it follows more exactly than any other measure the natural rhythm of respiration. Read "In Memoriam" and the "Lay of the Last Minstrel"—about twenty lines can be uttered in a minute, which is the average number of respirations per minute. One line is read for each expiration, with the inspiration at the end of the line.

Forgive these wild and wandering cries,  
Confusions of a wasted youth.

The peculiar majesty of the ten-syllabled or heroic line comes from the fact that its pronunciation requires a longer respiration than ordinary, hence the sense of effort. The cæsura comes in at irregular intervals and serves as a breathing place. But its management requires care in reading and entirely breaks up the natural rhythm of breathing.

Harp of the North that mouldering long hast hung  
On the witch elm that shades Saint Filian's spring.

The fourteen syllabled line of Chapman's Homer and the common metre of our hymn-book is very easy reading, because broken up into short alternate lines of six or eight syllables.

When all thy mercies, O my God!  
My rising soul surveys,  
Transported with the view, I'm lost  
In wonder, love, and praise.

The twelve-syllabled line of Drayton's "Polyalbion" is the most irksome of all lines, because of its unphysiological construction :

Of Albion's glorious isle the wonders whilst I write  
The sundry varying soils, the pleasures infinite.

Someone has said that "The Last Leaf" might be made the text of all that might be said in respect of Holmes' poetry. Every line is so choice, let me quote:

I saw him once before  
As he passed by the door,  
And again the pavement stones resound  
As he totters o'er the ground  
With his cane.

They say that, in his prime,  
Ere the pruning knife of time  
Cut him down,  
Not a better man was found  
In the town.

But now he walks the streets  
And he looks at all he meets  
    Sad and wan;  
And he shakes his feeble head  
That it seems as if he said,  
    "They are gone."

The mossy marbles rest  
On the lips that he has pressed  
    In their bloom;  
And the names he loved to hear  
Have been graved for many a year  
    On the tomb.

My grandmamma has said—  
Poor old lady she is dead  
    Long ago—  
That he had a Roman nose,  
And his cheek was like a rose  
    In the snow.

But now his nose is thin,  
And it rests upon his chin  
    Like a staff;  
And a crook is in his back,  
And a melancholy crack  
    In his laugh.

I know it is a sin  
For me to sit and grin  
    At him here;  
But the old three-cornered hat  
And the breeches and all that  
    Are so queer.

And if I should live to be  
The last leaf on the tree  
    In the spring,  
Let them smile, as I do now,  
At the old forsaken bow  
    Where I cling.

Such a little lyric makes us laugh and almost cry. The reader smiles through his tears.

Holmes' most-loved lyric is so well known that one verse must suffice:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,  
As the swift seasons roll.  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by Life's unresting sea.  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from Heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by Life's unresting sea.

Holmes was once asked whether he would choose to be known as the author of this poem or of his essay on "Puerperal Fever." Following his reply he said that in writing the "Nautilus" he was in the highest state of mental exaltation and

the most crystalline clairvoyance. "I mean that lucid vision of one's thought and of all forms of expression which will be at once precise and musical, which is the poet's special gift.

Holmes held that the poet always recognized a dictation *ab extra*, and we hardly think of a figure of speech when we talk of inspiration. In writing poetry, he says, the will is first called into requisition, to exclude interfering outward impressions and alien trains of thought. The second state or adjustment of the poet's double consciousness (for he has two states like the sommambulist) sets up its own automatic movement, with its special train of ideas and feelings in the thinking and emotional centres.

In the days of Holmes, the Lyceum lectures were excellent features of New England's intellectual life; of which he gives us an amusing word picture. He, of course, could not escape the attention of the Impressario. He lectured on Woodsworth, Moore, Keats and Shelley, contributing a poem on each at the end of each respective lecture. Besides these poets we know he loved Hood, Crabbe, Pope, Goldsmith and William Spencer.

Our hymnaries have not overlooked our poet, who strongly believed in the divine immanence.

O Love divine that stooped to share  
Our sharpest pain, our bitterest tear.  
On Thee we cast each earth-born care;  
We smile at pain if Thou art near.

A quatrain for another well-known hymn:

Though long the weary road we tread,  
And sorrow crown each lingering year,  
No path we shun, no darkness dread,  
Our heart still whispering, "Thou art near."

In philosophy, Holmes was a dualist, holding that the mind and soul do not belong to the category of physical energy, and are not convertible into other forms of force. A weight cannot be lifted by a logical demonstration, nor a tea kettle made to boil by writing an ode upon it. Time and space are our ways of looking at things. The will, compared with its pre-arranged restrictions, is like the water imprisoned in the crystal. There comes to us a sense of difficulty overcome when we make certain acts of choice; so that, if not free, we think we are, and this in itself constitutes a powerful motive; our thinking ourselves free is the key to our whole moral nature.

Holmes holds that the area of consciousness is covered with layers of habitual thoughts, as the sea beach is covered with wave-worn rounded pebbles, shaped smooth and polished by long attrition against one another. These thoughts remain very

much the same from day to day and even from year to year. The tides of wakening consciousness roll in upon them daily as we unclose our eyelids, and keep up a gentle movement and murmur of ordinary mental respiration until we close them again in slumber. When we think we are thinking we are for the most part listening to the sound of attrition between these new elements of our intelligence.

The Freudian school seem to have acquired the same points of their doctrine from Holmes, who held that the tree you are sticking in will be growing while you are sleeping; so with every idea that is implanted in a real thinker's mind; it will be growing when he is least conscious of it.

There are thoughts which never merge into consciousness which yet make their influence felt among the perceptible mental currents, just as unseen planets sway the movements of those which are watched and mapped by the astronomer.

We know very little of the contents of our minds until some sudden jar brings them to light, as an earthquake which shakes down a miser's house brings out stockings full of gold.

Holmes "Over the Teacups," he states, was started and interrupted by the course of events; the original plan having become shaped in the underground laboratory of his thoughts.

Of the field of abnormal psychology Holmes held that insanity may take the place of wretchedness of mind in will dethroned, but subject to the perpetual interferences of other minds, governed by laws alien and hostile to its own; insanity may be, perhaps, the only palliative left to Nature in this extremity. Before she comes to that she has many expedients.

On the point of personality, Holmes—following Wm. James, perhaps—holds that there are three Johns: (1) John as he sees himself to be; (2) as he appears to James; (3) as he appears to his Maker.

One close student of Oliver Wendell Holmes declares that he was, first and foremost, a theologian. Following are a few of his tenets in brief:

"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and a man's love is the measure of his fitness for good or bad company here or elsewhere.

"Men are tattooed with their special beliefs like so many South Sea Islanders; but a real human heart with divine love in it beats with the same glow under all patterns of all earth's thousand tribes.

"The creative and informing spirit which is with us and not of us is recognized everywhere in real and in storied life. The Zeus that kindled the rage of Achilles, the muse of Homer; the Daimon of Socrates; the inspiration of the seer; the mocking

devil that whispers to Margaret as she kneels at the altar; and the hobgoblin that cried ‘sell him, sell him,’ in the ear of John Bunyan. It shaped the forms that filled the soul of Michael Angelo when he saw the figure of the great lawgiver in the yet unhewn marble. It comes to the least of us as the voice that will be heard; it tells us what we must believe; it frames our sentences; it lends a sudden gleam of sense or eloquence to the dullest of us. This divine visitor chooses our brain as a dwelling-place and invests our naked thought with the purple of the kings of speech or song.” Or as he beautifully sings it,

Lord of all being throned afar,  
Thy glory flames from star to star,  
Centre and soul of every sphere,  
Yet to each loving heart how near.

Holmes opposed, (1) the notion of sin as a transferable object. As philanthropy has rid us of chattel slavery, so philosophy must rid us of chattel sin and its logical consequences; (2) The notion that what we call sin is anything else than inevitable, unless the Deity had seen fit to give every human being a perfect nature, and develop it by perfect education; (3) The oversight of the fact that all moral relations between man and his Maker are reciprocal, and must meet the approval of man’s enlightened conscience before he can render true heartfelt homage to the power that called him into being. Is not the greatest obligation to all eternity on the side of the greatest power and the greatest wisdom? (4) The notion that the Father of mankind is subject to the absolute control of a certain malignant entity known under the false name of justice, or subject to any law such as would have made the father of the prodigal son meet him with an account book and pack him off to jail, instead of welcoming him back and treating him to the fatted calf. (5) The notion that useless suffering is in any sense a satisfaction for sin, and not simply an evil added to a previous one.

Holmes contended that the limits of human responsibility have never been properly stated unless it be by phrenology. “This is a pseudo-science, but we owe it an immense debt. It has proved that there are fixed relations between organization, mind and character. It has brought out the great doctrine of moral insanity, which has done more to make men charitable and soften legal and theological barbarism than any one doctrine that I can think of since the message of peace and good will to me. . . . Treat bad men exactly as if they were insane. They are insane, out of health, morally; avoid collision with them in so far as you possibly can. Keep your good temper.

Restrain them from violence with the least possible injury as you would maniacs. When you have got rid of them or tied them hand and foot so they can do no mischief, sit down and contemplate them charitably, remembering that nine-tenths of their perversity comes from outside influences, drunken ancestors, abuse in childhood, bad companions . . . There are special influences which work in the blood like ferments.

"There is good reason to believe there are persons who are born more or less completely blind to moral distinctions, just as some are born color blind." This might be taken as the text of Healy's new book on "Pathological Lying and Prevarication." And who knows but the idea of Healy's clinic in the criminal court in Boston, the aim of which is to find in how far the criminal career is due to pathological conditions over which he has no control, germinated in the mind of Holmes?

Holmes was a member of the Saturday Club. Among its members were Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, Agassiz, Field, Wm. James, Whipple, Motley, Richard Dana, Jr., William H. Prescott, Francis Parkman, James Freeman Clarke, Charles Francis Adams, W. D. Howells, J. S. Dwight, Bishop Brooks, and many other brilliant men. We believe no such notable galaxy of intellectuals has been assembled anywhere in America since. In this brilliant constellation Oliver Wendell Holmes shone as a star of the first magnitude.

Holmes did not escape criticism: one critic accuses him of creating a spirit of caste in and around the "Hub," which made it hard for young writers to climb. Another states that he gave every encouragement to young aspirants who appealed to him; and turned down the inefficient with the greatest gentleness. Burroughs speaks slightlying: "Who would expect anything profound from J. G. Holland, Chapin, O. W. Holmes, Alger, Alcott, Helps, Dickens, Lewes, Froude or Lowell?"

Mr. F. T. Congdon, a close student of Holmes, considers that the greatest enduring characteristic of Holmes' genius is his perfect mastery of the art of quiet, gentle satire. "Holmes," he writes, "never makes me laugh aloud, but tickles me and makes me greatly quiver beneath the ribs."